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## FRESH AIR WORK

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Last March the philanthropic agencies of New York, including the press and church, became very much agitated because of an attempt to appropriate portions of small parks and playgrounds for temporary school buildings. A delegation representing over 40 of these agencies appeared before a legislative committee to oppose the bill. They had labored for a generation to secure the recognition of playgrounds and health spaces as public necessities, and realized the insidiousness of an attack, admittedly sincere, coming in the name of popular education. At first they were tempted to minimize the part-time evil by showing that, even in its overcrowded condition, the city could give its 73,000 part-time primary pupils at least four hours a day. But, as the defenders of playgrounds became conscious of their united strength, they decided to meet the issue face to face. Boldly and convincingly they declared that the need for providing spaces and playgrounds in congested portions of the great metropolis is second to no other need whatsoever, not even that for schooling.

Quite naturally the conversation of delegates on the return trip drifted to the social significance of small parks, and thence to Fresh Air Work. Two of us were comparing summer plans for our two special interests—a social settlement and a relief agency. The settlement head worker lamented the great amount of interest and money expended upon Fresh Air Work, more particularly day excursions. “We could accomplish so much more with our money and our time if we provided fresh air and wholesome recreation within the congested districts themselves.” This argument, like that for temporary schools in parks, tempts one to evade the main challenge and to seek a foothold by minimizing the probability of spending Fresh Air money effectively within city limits. But so sound is the theory underlying the present method of using Fresh Air funds, and so far-reaching the results, that we gain force by meeting the challenge face to face. “As the playground is a greater educational force than the temporary school building, so the trip to seashore or country has a better effect upon city amusements and health than does the city playground. Furthermore, just as the permanent

playground creates a public sentiment in favor of adequate school facilities, so the summer outing educates public opinion to demand and support a complete system of breathing spaces and playgrounds."

If so broad a platform can properly be claimed for Fresh Air Work, it must assume in our minds greater significance as a factor in the social uplift, and the measure of its support should go beyond "summer's sweltering heat" to "winter's hardships," and thence to include "the need for structural changes in city conditions relating to health and recreation." In support of this claim, let us consider the scope of Fresh Air Work, the characteristics of its beneficiaries and the nature of its results.

Strictly speaking, Fresh Air Work should include self-centered as well as altruistic efforts to remove individuals from city conditions to those of seashore and country. In fact, the words themselves imply neither space limit nor time limit, and apply to either winter or summer work, as well as to all steps within city limits to substitute health-promoting atmosphere for the unsanitary conditions due to overcrowding. In its widest sense, therefore, the term comprehends trips to Nassau at Easter time, to Tuxedo in November and May, as well as to convalescent hospitals within or without city limits in January or in July. It applies likewise to the thousands of men and women who are now perfecting plans for next summer's outing. Fresh Air Work is done by "personal conductors" of tourists, by suburban parks which advertise world-wonder attractions, by railroad and steamship companies whose guide-books are now in great demand, by seaside resorts catering to summer appetites of clerks and shopgirls and professional men, and by the boys' and girls' clubs now negotiating for tents and camping sites or country boarding-houses. The capital invested in this sort of Fresh Air Work is constantly growing, and even savings banks are beginning to count upon substantial withdrawals during July and August to defray vacation expenses.

But the Fresh Air Work considered by this article has to do with self-centered efforts only so far as these reinforce the influence of altruistic Fresh Air Work upon city standards of fresh air and recreation. Technically, Fresh Air Work applies to those activities which enable such tenement residents as are known to themselves and others as poor to go for one day or more to seashore or country.

To the philanthropic organization those persons are poor who are willing to accept help in leaving town, and whose condition proves that, unaided, they can have no outing. It does not include those who are persuaded during the winter months to save (with others of their own group) in order to start and maintain a self-supporting summer camp. Praiseworthy as is the movement to encourage self-supporting Fresh Air camps, it is still in its infancy; while Fresh Air Work for the needy may be said to have reached maturity in most of our large cities.

During the summer of 1903, in that portion of Greater New York known as Manhattan and the Bronx, twenty-four agencies gave excursions up the river, to seashore or country to 35,195 mothers and 81,269 babies and older children; while twenty-two agencies gave "stays" of a week or more to 7,618 mothers and 26,543 babies and older children. Work of a similar character has been done in practically every community known to the census as a city. In other cities, as in New York, we regret to state that the need for Fresh Air Work in behalf of older boys and men has been overlooked.

Without undertaking to distinguish the different kinds of Fresh Air Work, or to enumerate the agencies conducting it, let us note the physical needs of the mothers and children who profit directly from these undertakings. I beg permission to choose for illustration those mothers and those children whom I have myself seen and known—guests for the summer of 1903 at Sea Breeze, the seaside home of the New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor. They number over 20,000, a shrinkage of about 2,000 as compared with the year before, due to the rainy season. We entertained 17,700 day excursionists from 3,637 families, while 2,754 members of 900 families were kept at Sea Breeze an average of ten days each. Of the total term guests, 2,010 were children and 744 adult women. To care for and entertain these children and women we provided a city investigating staff of twenty visitors and an examining physician, and a seashore staff consisting of superintendent, three nurses, a kindergartner with two assistants, two swimming masters and a corps of cooks, waitresses, laundry women, etc.

We expect to keep Sea Breeze open this coming summer from May 17 to September 30, making a total of nineteen weeks.

The usual Fresh Air season is but eight weeks, beginning after the 4th of July and continuing through August. In deciding thus to lengthen our season, we have in mind our experience of last summer, when, after rejecting 5,000 applicants, we were compelled to close our doors to 1,500 mothers and children pronounced eligible because of physical need. We had not expected such a demand last summer, because the average temperature was very cool, and because during the three months, June, July and August, there were forty-eight rainy days. Starting with the supposition that the principal cause of Fresh Air Work was the sweltering heat of summer, it seemed that we should have a decrease in the number of applications. There was, in fact, the expected decrease in the number who cared to take day trips. The constant pressure for the week's rest and recreation proved that, independent of summer temperature, there is necessity for Fresh Air facilities, occasioned by winter's hardship, overwork, overcrowding and under-nutrition.

The past winter has been one of unusual hardships among the working classes in New York city. Funds that should have been used to nourish the sick and the weak have been diverted to supply coal and extra clothing and extra nourishment for the bread-winners of the family. Children's diseases, pneumonia, influenza, etc., have been very general. During the months of January and February over 6,500 names were added to our relief list, over half owing their distress to sickness. Courage and physical strength may have borne the strain during the bitter cold weather, but we know from many years' experience that the first hot spells will prove to many hundreds of mothers that they have reached or passed beyond their limit of endurance. We propose to extend our Fresh Air season, therefore, not only because we anticipate a summer of extreme heat, but because we want to renew the strength of mothers who have undertaken more than they should have undertaken during the past winter, and who need Sea Breeze if they are to carry next winter's burden. It is not extravagant to state that one fortnight in the country or at the seashore will accomplish more for a sick mother or sick child from the tenements than two months of dispensary care in the city. Motives of economy as well as humanity prompt to an extended Fresh Air season.

It is not meant to imply that summer discomforts and distress

are not of themselves justification for Fresh Air hospitals. It is, indeed, a misfortune to be compelled to spend an entire summer in a city like New York or Philadelphia, even though one may live on Fifth Avenue or Spruce Street. Those of us who have not ourselves tried to sleep in an over-crowded, badly lighted, noisy tenement when the temperature is at 100 degrees, cannot realize the discomforts which the tenement resident is forced to endure. If, to the stifling heat, and the noises, and the unpleasant odors, and the lack of privacy, we add the physical pain of being ill and uncared for, there would seem to be sufficient reason in the summer heat itself for establishing refuges without city limits. But it seems worth while to remind ourselves that tenement residents suffer during winter months as well as in summer from foul air, overcrowding, overwork, under-nutrition and exposure. Winter conditions breed summer distress. In other words, to a large percentage of our population summer would be one continual agony even though the temperature never rose above eighty degrees.

If the readers of *THE ANNALS* could visit Sea Breeze they would be surprised at the absence of any hospital atmosphere. From six in the morning until seven at night the swings are in constant motion, the delight of children of every age. After the children are put away for the night, the swings are kept in motion for an hour or two by the mothers, to whom swings are a luxury associated only with Sea Breeze. I remember one night last summer when there were five widowed mothers under thirty competing in a swinging contest. They forgot that only the week before they had been pronounced sick or worn-out by an examining physician; nor would an onlooker have imagined that these five prematurely aged women of thirty were the possessors of thirty children.

During the summer Sea Breeze entertained 243 widows, with 562 children under 16, and 462 under working-age. Notwithstanding the presence of nurses and the daily visits of a physician, the atmosphere is one of confidence, and is really very lonesome for a child or mother who persists in a desire to indulge in self-pity.

As I write I hold in my hand three pictures. One, a group of 200 mothers and children just entering the grounds after the long trolley ride. They have been passed upon by a physician, who has determined which families need two weeks, and which need the special

attention of nurses. It is true, the pictures do not show the dejected, worn-out expressions which we at the office associate with the Tuesday party; yet even a stranger would see that this group, especially the mothers, have been unaccustomed to freedom from care. If the reader would mingle with the mothers, he would be given detailed descriptions of ailments galore. In fact, on the outward journey, one might well imagine that the principal object of Sea Breeze was to furnish a clearing-house for the recounting of diseases and woes. But it just so happens that one half hour on the beach, within sound and sight of the surf, is generally sufficient to direct the eye and the mind away from disease and overwork toward health and vitality.

The second picture is of a little lad we called Wee Wee, after his only spoken word. Even in the picture, taken after his first week, he looks fragile. When he came to us he could not speak a word or take a step. Neither the mother nor the physician could more than hope that Wee Wee would be cured. He was with us three weeks. When his mother returned she wept, not only while she was saying good-bye, but during the entire homeward journey, out of sheer gratitude that Wee Wee was strong and bright. She brought him back a few weeks afterwards for Sunday, and he ran wildly around the porch and had already acquired a good working vocabulary.

The other picture is of a mother with seven children, all under working-age, the youngest a little baby named Dot. The children were at Sea Breeze last summer for two weeks, Dot being consigned to seven-year-old Charlotte. Day in and day out Charlotte refused to play. She must mind Dot. At last, however, out of desperation, rather than any weakness, she yielded to invitations to try the swings. She had difficulty in bolstering Dot up in the sand, and every time, just as her experiment with the swing seemed about to begin, Dot would topple over. Finally, Charlotte grabbed the youngster, gave one or two vigorous shakes, and said;—"Dot, for God's sake, sit up; I do so want a swing."

These pictures illustrate what we can do for the beneficiaries of our Fresh Air Work. We can give them health. We can give them hope. We can give them a week or two weeks of unbroken pleasure; but these are only the minimum, the least that we may hope to do. We can teach mothers the value of regular meals for

their babies. We can show them how to prepare these meals and the danger of certain classes of foods. We can compel them to sleep in well ventilated rooms, and even in a fortnight make ventilation a part of their standard of living. We can also make bathing a pleasure and strict cleanliness of person and home a part of their minimum standard. Some of them can learn to sew. In a word, we can inspire desires which will in a great measure direct their efforts during the succeeding winter months. We cannot do this with all families, nor can we hope to do this with ninety per cent., but we are sure, from many years' experience, that, with a considerable proportion, impressions gained at Sea Breeze are permanent, and we are sure that, because of their acquaintance with Sea Breeze standards, they will appreciate, as never before, the appeals for tenement reform, free public baths and for other structural changes in those city conditions to which they owe their distress.

It is not customary to relate Fresh Air Work to the larger educational and moral forces upon which we rely for social betterment, but I venture to suggest that no other investment is so successful in attracting the attention of these thousands of mothers and children to the positive sides of governmental activity. In their tenement homes they are apt to associate government with restrictions. Even tenement reform itself is even yet too generally understood to mean inspection at inconvenient hours rather than positive benefits assured. How the boy in the congested districts is accustomed to regard open spaces may be shown by one incident when our larger boys built a park under the trees, known to the mothers as "scenery." The park was about fifteen feet wide and thirty feet long. Sea shells marked the boundaries, a policeman was stationed in each corner, and along the front sea shells spelled out the words:—"Keep Off." I am glad to report that a short time at Sea Breeze made such a park "too citified," and after considerable discussion it was decided to make a park of the entire beach, where every child could have a good time.

If the foregoing paragraphs would seem to minimize the sweltering heat of summer as a reason for Fresh Air Work, it is only because I would like to think of our Fresh Air homes as hospitals and schools rather than as refuges. We can never hope to restrict the summer temperature to eighty degrees and under. We can never hope to give an outing of a week or more to the entire city population, but



we can confidently look forward to a time when we can mitigate the distress due to summer heat by providing Fresh Air parks and playgrounds, by securing better ventilation in homes and by inculcating better standards of living, which will fight heat with cleanliness, fresh air and nourishing food. It would seem desirable to impress these larger purposes, not only upon the Fresh Air agencies, but also upon press and church and contributing public. When we secure the utmost possible co-operation among these various educational forces, we may hope to have our Fresh Air Work not only atone for extremes of heat and cold, exposure and arduous toils, but also raise up in the minds and souls of all beneficiaries standards which will react upon the conditions of city life. Thus will one dollar now invested in Fresh Air Work without city limits stimulate and guarantee the expenditure of one hundred or one thousand dollars to provide constant Fresh Air Work, refreshing baths and wholesome recreation within the city limits. And thus, perhaps, may we hope to secure the additional public interest required to finance the constantly growing summer Fresh Air Work.

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